

What we know about NSA leaker Edward Snowden

By Tracy Connor, Staff Writer, NBC News

The 29-year-old computer whiz who says he divulged details about National Security Agency's data-collecting programs has also revealed specifics of his life story, from an upbringing in North Carolina to a top-secret contract in Hawaii.

Speaking from a Hong Kong hotel that he reportedly has since left, Edward Snowden told The Guardian that he had enjoyed a "very comfortable life," but one marked by mounting disillusionment with what he views as government intrusion into the private lives of American citizens.

"I don't want to live in a society that does these sort of things ... I do not want to live in a world where everything I do and say is recorded. That is not something I am willing to support or live under," he said.

Here's some of what we know about the bespectacled self-proclaimed "spy" who is being called both a traitor and a hero:

The demand for private intelligence contractors grew quickly after 9/11, leading to a large number of young, smart hires, many of whom have top secret clearances. Now, intelligence agencies say they could not function effectively without the expertise of these hires. NBC's Lisa Myers reports.

Background: Born June 21, 1983, he grew up in Wilmington, N.C., but later moved to Ellicott City, Md., he told The Guardian. His mother, Wendy, is the chief deputy clerk for administration and information technology at the federal court in Baltimore, a court official told NBC News. His father, Lonnie, is a former Coast Guard officer who lives in Pennsylvania, the Allentown Morning Call reported. A neighbor said he has an older sister who is an attorney.

"He was a quiet guy, kept to himself. He always dressed nice, was clean cut. He just reminded me of a brainiac," said neighbor Joyce Kinsey. "I feel terrible for his family." In his interview with The Guardian, Edward Snowden said the only thing he feared from outing himself is the "harmful effects on my family."

Education: He did not complete high school. He told The Guardian that he studied computers at a community college and obtained a general equivalency degree. A spokesman for Anne Arundel Community College confirmed that a student with the same name and birth date took classes there, from 1999 to 2001 and again in 2004 and 2005.

Military service: He spent four months in the Army reserves, from May to September 2004 as a special forces recruit to a 14-week training course, the Army said. "He did not complete any training or receive any awards," an Army statement said. No other details were given, but Snowden told The Guardian he was discharged after breaking his legs in an accident.